

HB 7277 & SB 1070

My name is Thomas Swarr and I reside at 8 Shultas Place in Hartford, CT. I am urging you to support both HB 7277 and SB 1070. The negative impacts of blighted properties have been well documented, but reading reports is not the same as living next to a blighted property. On my street we have two vacant homes that have been neglected for years. Both have had fires. One house sat for years with an open hole in the roof after the fire, despite city ordinances that require a building to be secured after a fire. The blighted property adjacent to our home similarly ignored city ordinances to secure a vacant property. I have been greeted by a rat in my kitchen due to the conditions of this property. It is not that the City has not made an effort. We are on a first name basis with city license and inspection officials, but their hands are often tied by legal requirements that put protection of personal property rights above the protection of public health.

Blighted properties not only present a fire and health hazard. They also attract or encourage antisocial behavior. The blighted property is an invitation to dump other bulky waste. Adjacent properties are devalued, providing less incentive for other property owners to invest. Both these bills provide necessary tools for cities to be better able to rehab properties in disrepair.

Land banks are especially critical in cities like Hartford that simply do not have adequate resources to address the problem of blighted properties. By providing access to additional financial resources and professional staff, land banks can help alleviate overburdened city staff. By transferring properties to responsible owners through a land bank program, the city is relieved of expensive maintenance programs and other nuisance calls, such as squatters. Further, land bank officials are not tied to a two- year election cycle and can take a longer view towards building stable neighborhoods. There cannot be vibrant urban areas unless we find a solution for the blighted properties.

It is important to acknowledge the difference between those who want to care for their properties but may lack necessary resources from those who know how to game the system. The absentee landlords know every trick on how to delay action to fix blighted properties. During the protracted legal game, the buildings further degrade, making it ever more difficult to justify the expense of a rehab. Cities need better tools to preserve the value of these properties during the legal challenges, and the conservation of abandoned and blighted properties is much needed.

Although we have two blighted properties on our block, we also have responsible neighbors that care for their homes. It is a great neighborhood, but could be even better if these blighted properties could be transferred to responsible owners. I strongly support both HB 7277 and SB 1070 as responsible legislation that would provide economic benefits due to increased property values, and more importantly significantly improve the quality of life in any neighborhood currently suffering with blighted properties.